# Central American
# NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.
Editor: Michael P. Birks, 36 Trevor Road, Flixton, URMSTON, Manchester M41 5QH. England. 0161-747 5924.

Vol.IV, No.65 October 1996

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The **Central American Group** is a part of the **Spanish Main Philatelic Society,** the leading Society in the world for collectors of Latin America. The journal of the SMPS is *The Mainsheet*, published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription from the Secretary, Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, PETERBOROUGH PE3 8TQ, England. Phone 01733 2687078. Subscription is currently £8 in Europe or $20 elsewhere. Cheques in sterling of US$ should be made payable to "The Spanish Main". A three year subscription of £21/$54 and a five year subscription of £30/$80 are available and payment for these longer subscriptions may be made by Access, Mastercard or Visa. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining during the course of the year the appropriate part subscriptions should be added - Feb-Apr £6/$15; May-Aug £4/$10; Sep-Nov £2/$5 to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect.

The **Central American Group** caters for the collectors of Mexico to Panama. Its journal, which you are now reading, is published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription. The subscription is currently £6/$11 resident in the UK or in Europe, or £8/$15 elsewhere. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining after June 1st, add 50% to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect. Cheques in sterling payable to "The CA Group" should be sent to the treasurer, David Hankey, 2 Prince's Drive, Marple, STOCKPORT SK6 6NJ, England. Phone 0161-449 0693. We shall be pleased to forward the relevant portions of multi-subscription cheques to the SMPS or the Chile Group.

We regret we cannot accept dollar cheques for subscriptions because each cheque costs £5/$8 to negotiate.

Back issues are available to members at 75p/$1.50 each, although Volumes 1 and 2 can be purchased for £10/$20 each, complete, inclusive of postage. Non-members may request a sample copy for 75p/$1.50 post paid. Requests for back issues should be sent the the Editor, to whom cheques should be made payable. Undated dollar cheques are acceptable for this service.

The group leader is Richard Saundry, Gwrych Cottage, Godstone Road, Bletchingley, REDHILL RH1 4PL, Surrey, England. Phone 01883 742186.

The group does not run a packet. The SMPS Packet Secretary is Brian Sylvester, 3 Russell Court, St Lukes Road, MAIDENHEAD SL6 7AP Berkshire, England. Phone 01628 784555.

Although most packets are of a general nature, there are occasional specialised one country packets. Good and unusual material is always wanted.

Owing to insurance difficulties, the packet is not available to overseas members, although we shall be pleased to accept material for inclusion from them.

The auctioneer of the SMPS is Brian Moorhouse, to whom Auction and Private Treaty lots should be sent. Brian is a dealer, and will include your name on his mailing list if requested to do so.

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## EDITORIAL

As promised in our last issue, those who subscribe to our journal will find enclosed a sample copy of *El Faro*, the journal of the Associated Collectors of El Salvador. We are pleased to be able to do this with the assistance and support of Jeff Brasor, the Editor and Group Leader. In a similar manner his members are to receive a copy of this journal. I am delighted to be able to take part in this mutual exchange since I have for some time been conscious of the lack of representation of Salvador in our journal.

I was sorry that more of our members were notable to join us at Peterborough in July. We had a most enjoyable day with a superb buffet, thanks to Mimi, and two superb displays of stamps (the first commemorative of Nicaragua - the Zelaya issue and Costa Rica SG&Scott 1). Its always nice to see old friends and I am only sorry that the social side of our club is not better supported.

## IN MEMORIAM

It is with great sadness that we report the death of two of our most respected members from the United States of America.

**CLYDE MAXWELL** founder of the Nicaraguan Study Circle and founder and Editor of its journal *Nicarao* passed away on 10 March 1996.

**Col. ROMEO "Ruthless" ROUTHIER** was a leading collector of Guatemala and passed away on 19 June 1996 whilst preparing for a trip to Mexico.

Although I never met either collector we corresponded regularly and I shall miss them both as will those who knew them RIP.

For the diary:- Details of our Autumn programme will appear in August's *Mainsheet*

**Saturday 28 June 1997,** 10.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m.

MIDPEX, Midland Sports Centre, Cromwell Lane, Tile Hill, Coventry
*The Exhibition for National/Specialist Philatelic Societies.*

**mpb**

# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL "A.R." SYSTEM IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

## Part 1

by Richard H Saundry.

It is extremely fortunate that "A.R." stands for equivalent phrases in three different languages: officially "A.R." stands for "Avis de Reception" in French, the official language of the UPU, but equally the same letters can stand for "Acknowledgment (or Advice) of Receipt" in English, or "Acuse (or Aviso) de Recibo (or Recepcion)" in Spanish. For a small supplementary fee the "A.R." system provides the sender of a registered letter, (nowadays usually the post office of despatch), official confirmation that the delivery office has safely delivered the letter to the addressee.

Few British collectors actively collect "A.R." covers as a subject in its own right. Possibly a major reason for this is that in most countries such as Britain the postal system tends to be reasonably reliable and registered letters rarely go astray. A supplementary "A.R." service has never really been needed for UK domestic registered mails, and I suspect as a result both the British public and the majority of British stamp collectors alike are generally unaware that the service has always been available on demand both for internal and foreign registered letters. On the other hand collectors of the stamps and postal history of countries where the posts are generally perceived as being less reliable cannot but be aware that senders of registered letters often availed themselves of "A.R." facilities, and "A.R." registered letters are often encountered.

Registered covers, and "A.R." registered covers in particular, often make attractive collectors' items. The higher tariffs required for registration services necessitates the use either of higher denomination or multiple copies of lower denomination stamps which are rarely found on ordinary letters. One area of the world where "A.R." service saw extensive use was/is Latin America. The main thrust of this brief introduction to Central American "A.R." letters is to highlight how different procedural interpretations of the provisions of the "A.R." service by certain Central American republics could lead to the creation of what on the surface appear to be anomalously rated covers. I hope to demonstrate that it was possible, depending which procedures were adopted by a given Republic, to create under certain circumstances what appear to the uninitiated to be overfranked ordinary registered covers, or in other circumstances to create apparent underfranked "A.R." covers.

First how did the "A.R." service operate? In certain Latin American countries a domestic Acknowledgment of Receipt service was operative long before such a service was available internationally. We can assume international "A.R." service first became freely available sometime after each Central American republic joined the UPU (Costa Rica 1883; El Salvador 1879; Guatemala 1881; Honduras 1879; Mexico 1879; Nicaragua 1882) although there may or may not have been some subsequent delay in introducing this aspect of reciprocal treatment of international mails. It is likely that when the international "A.R." service was first introduced that it was envisaged a similar procedure to that which was already in use for domestic registered letters could be implemented, i.e. there would be return of countersigned covers or fronts of registered items to the senders as proof of safe delivery. Such items are, however, extremely scarce. Returned covers, if they ever existed, either ended up in official archives and thus became unavailable to interested collectors, or if they were delivered back to the senders would in all likelihood be regarded as spent items of little value and invariably thrown away. I cannot recall having seen or read about such a cover emanating from Costa Rica, my principal area of collecting interest. The closest that I have ever come to such a cover (Fig 1) is a stampless registered envelope sent Puerto Limon to Jamaica in October 1902 which carries in addition to the more usual registry markings a blue "DEVUEVASE EL SOBRE / FIRMADO (space) / (space) A LIMON. C-R".

Figure 1.

This Costa Rican postmark would seem to be the resurrected use of an earlier previously unrecorded type of postmark which I surmise was originally intended to be used in conjunction with the earlier "A.R." service by providing space for a recipient to sign the envelope before returning to the office of despatch. The reverse of this example bears the signature Samuel Robinson, which differs from that of the addressee (Joseph Johnson). If Mr. Robinson was not the local postmaster he was almost certainly another person residing at the delivery address and thus acceptable to the delivery office. I have often wondered where the responsibility of the delivery office ends. If the delivery office was supposed to collect the signature of the addressee, who would then be responsible in the event of subsequent complaint if a person other than the addressee at the required address had signed for it? Perhaps the delivery office in Jamaica knew both people at the delivery address, or more likely responsibility ended when the letter was safely delivered to the address on the letter. Incidentally before Mexico joined the UPU in 1879, Post Office regulations required that the fronts of *all* registered letters in that country had to be retained by post offices as records of delivery: such fronts (Fig 2) are often dismissed by uninformed collectors as being only "part entires", whereas in reality such items resulted from correct Mexican Post Office practice and should in theory only be expected to survive in this state.

Figure 2.

Standard procedures for universal use were laid down by the General Postal Union Treaty of 1874, and amplified by the UPU Conventions held in Paris in 1878. Article 10 of the Paris Convention (1st June 1878) stated "that registered articles, the acknowledgment of delivery relating to them,

express letters, etc., and, if there be one, the special list contemplated in Para. 3 of Article 9 (i.e, when the number of registered articles requires it) are made up in a separate packet, which is to be suitably enclosed and sealed so as to preserve the contents". Hence it is clear that by 1878 an "A.R." form was transmitted at the same time as the article of mail to which it was related, but in a separate official registered envelope. The receiving office was to collate the "A.R." form with the package, notify the addressee, obtain his signature on the form, datestamp and countersign this, then return the form to the office of origin, again in an official registered envelope. Returning signed "A.R." forms to offices of despatch necessitated employment of a novel kind of official postal stationery envelope, which not often being mentioned in standard catalogues, is rarely found in postal stationery collections. Such envelopes usually specify name of country and "Avis de reception en retour".

Figure 3.

Interestingly the language is always French, the language of the UPU. I show a Costa Rican example (Fig 3) sent from San Jose to Brussels in 1891, which undoubtedly was used for the return of signed "A.R." forms relating to Belgian "A.R." letters arriving in Costa Rica. Signed "A.R." forms were themselves regarded as items worthy of safeguarding and such "Avis de reception en retour" envelopes are invariably found used as registered items. I add, tongue in cheek, that such items of official mail should never have themselves been sent as "A.R." registered letters since this would have created a self-perpetuating correspondence - just think about it!

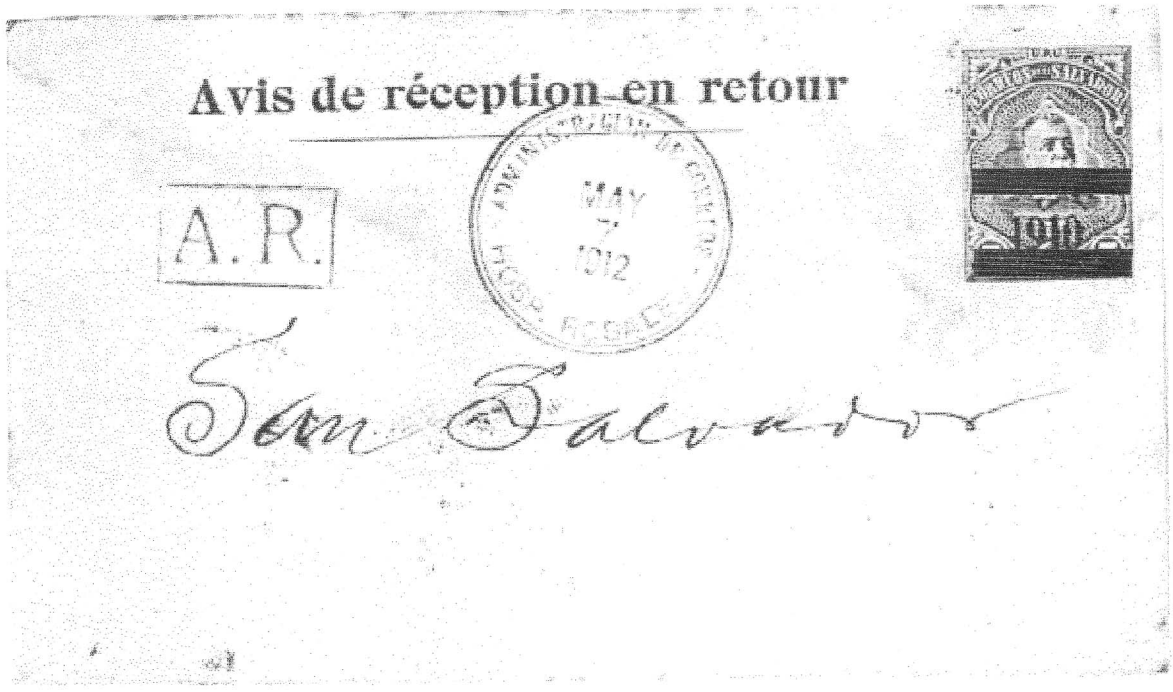


Figure 4.

Nevertheless Fig. 4 is that of domestic use in El Salvador in 1910 of one of these special items of postal stationery for return of "A.R." forms which was actually stamped "A.R.". I believe, however, this was chance mis-use of the "A.R." handstamp: all other domestic Salvadorean envelopes of this type I have seen were more appropriately struck with a registered handstamp.

Reprinted from "The Stamp Lover" with the permission of the author and the Editor, Michael Furnell.

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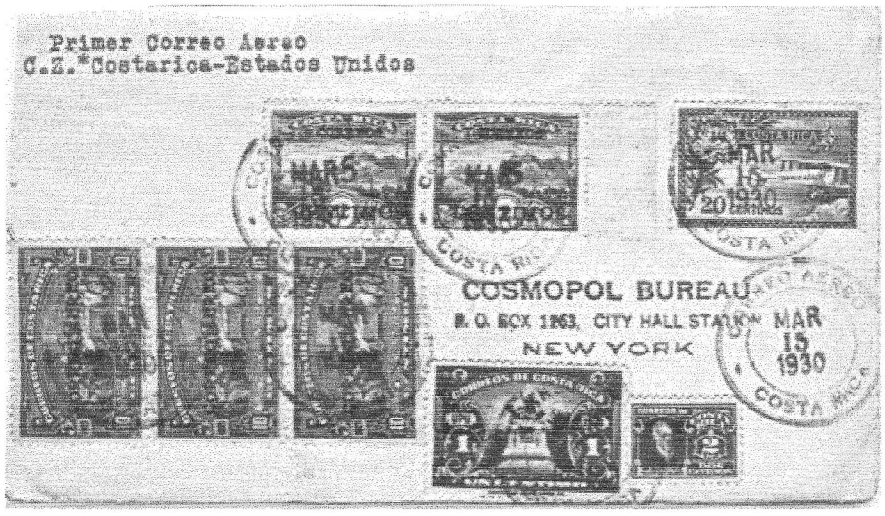
## FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE BEGINNING OF REGULAR COSTA RICAN AIRMAIL SERVICES CANL 64:40 - a correction

In the article in our last issure the wrong illustration was shown as figure 3. The correct cover is shown below (reduced).




Dick Saundry believes this to be a dubious cover because (1) all genuine first flight covers were dated 11 March (this is dated 15 March) (2) there is no first flight cachet and (3) the surcharged airmail stamps were issued on 14 March (Scott) or 16 March (SG, Michel and Saenz). It was probably flown on the third flight north, on 17th, hence no delay.

# A POSTCARD FROM NICARAGUA

## from TONY JAMES

Those of you who collect Nicaragua will be aware that Managua suffered the last of a series of devastating earthquakes in 1972 and as a result the legendary Howard Hughes had to be flown out of the city and back to the States.

One of the most easily recognisable symbols of that city was the cathedral, built in the Spanish colonial style. It was destroyed along with many other buildings on that occasion.

Tony James has just returned from Managua and sends us two cards; one of the old cathedral and one of the new building to replace it.

*The old cathedral as it appeared in 1994*

*The new cathedral*

As Tony says:

"The architecture of the new Cathedral is designed to create a feeling of the Middle East and the roots of Christianity. Each of the domes represents an area of the country. The church is surrounded by quite a large area of palm trees which have grown up and partly hides it. Personally I thought it looked good and is in the centre of what will become the new Managua. Once the palm trees become more established they should provide a nice shady cooler point in the city centre.

Local people I think would have been happier with a more conventional design; I heard it described as an upside down egg box. I hope that they get to like it - Managua really has not got a lot going for it."

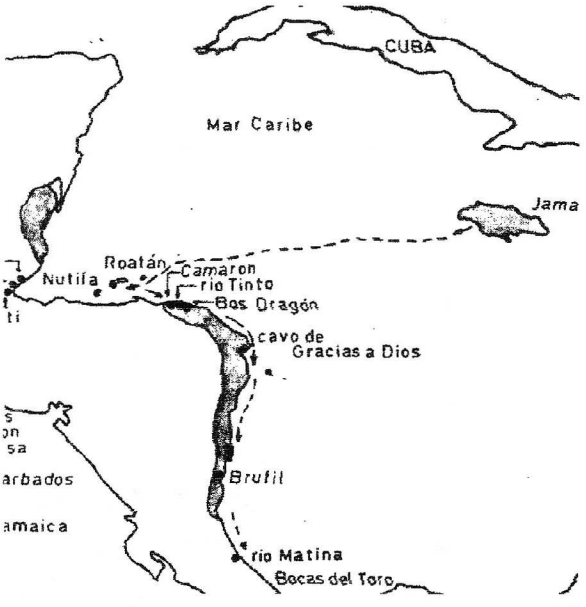
Regarding philately in Nicaragua he adds:

"I was told that there is a small collectors group in Nicaragua with only three serious collectors but very enthusiastic. My contact in Nicaragua is a Mr Pertze. His father was depicted on the 4 Cordoba denomination of the 1993 'Famous Philatelists of Nicaragua'."

# TWO MORE LETTERS FROM THE MOSQUITO SHORE

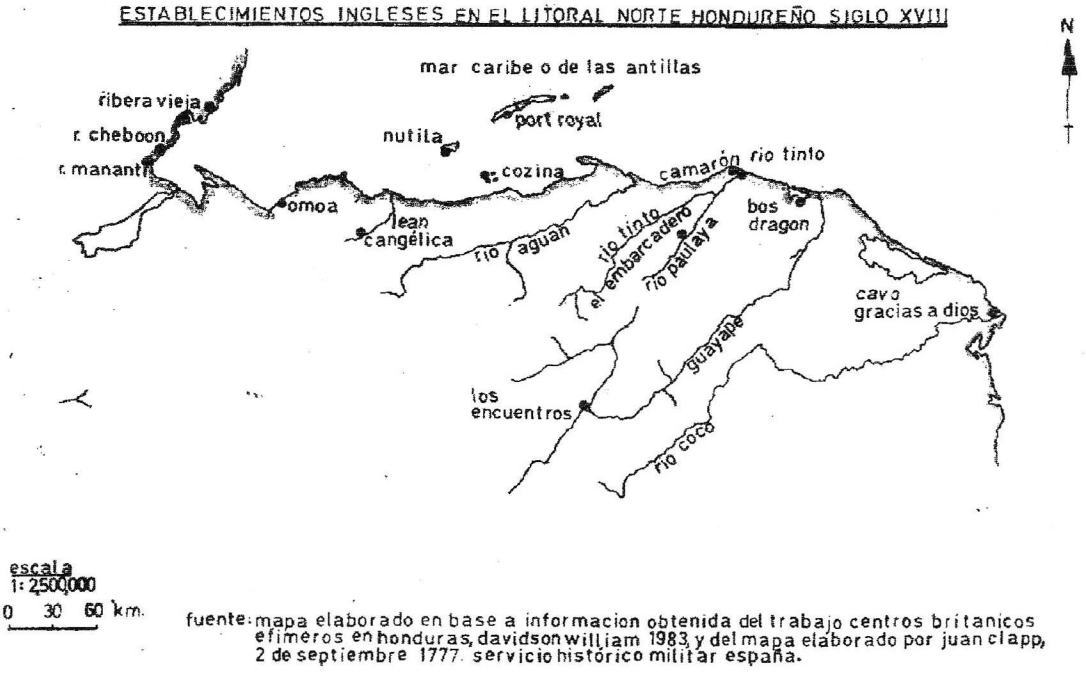
## by RICHARD WASHBURN

I enjoyed seeing the letter from the Bluefields shore to Mr Robert Hodgson. I would like to mention two other letters from the same correspondence that were mailed by Robert Hodgson from Black River, Honduras, in 1763 and 1764.




In the eighteenth century Central America had not yet been divided into countries as they are known today. The region was known at the time as the *Audencia de Guatemala* and was for the most part ruled by the Spanish.

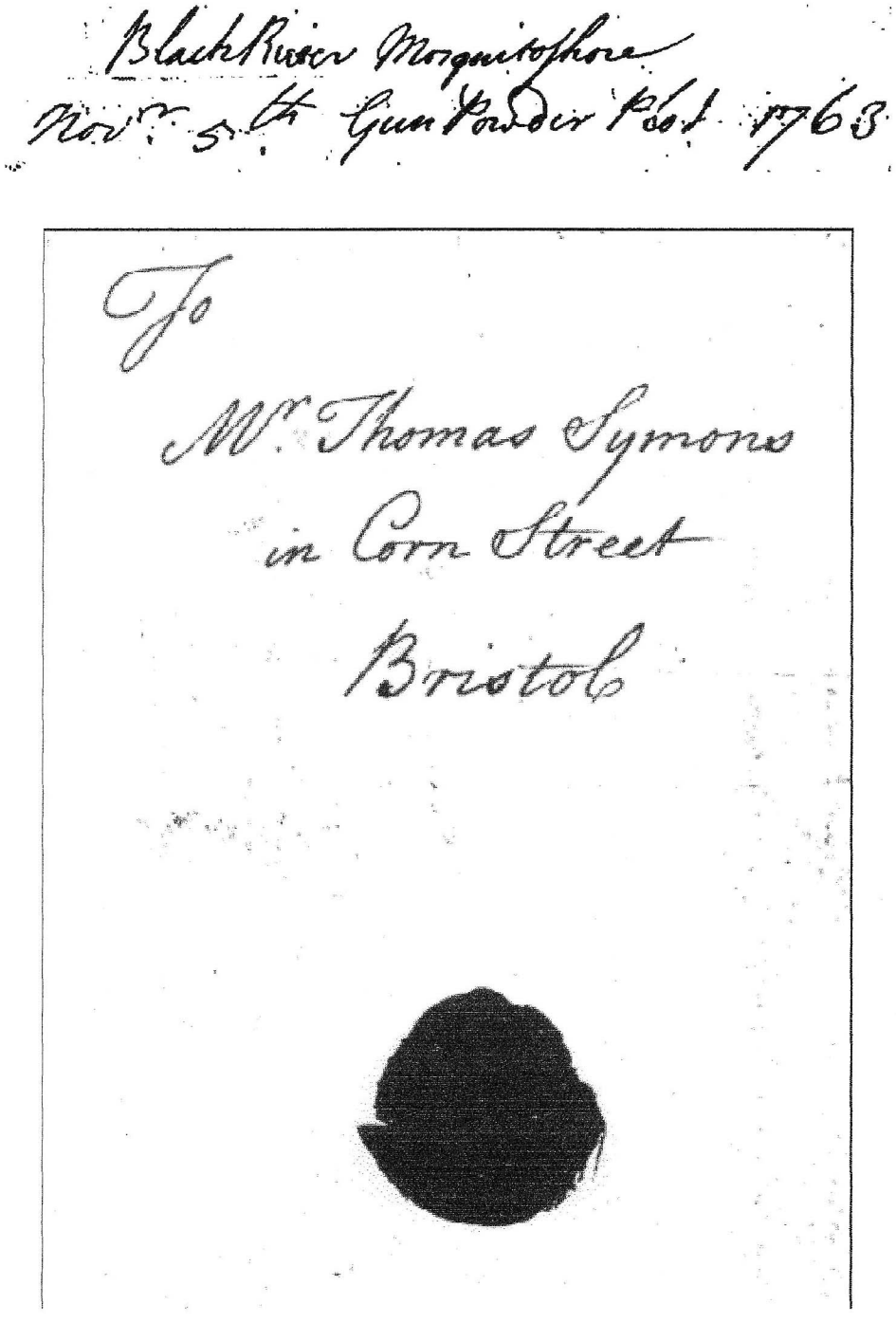
The main exception was the Carribean Coast, where from Honduras through Nicaragua to the border with Costa Rica, the narrow coastal plain was "ruled" by the English and known as the "Mosquito Coast", a corruption of the name of the indigenous indians, the "Misquitos".




fuente: mapa elaborado en base a informacion obtenida del trabajo centros britanicos efimeros en honduras, davidson william 1983, y del mapa elaborado por juan clapp, 2 de septiembre 1777. servicio historico militar españa.

It was here, on the Mosquito Coast, that the British extracted the hardwoods, mainly mahogany, that craftsmen like Chippendale turned into beautiful pieces of furniture. The resources of the region were therefore of great importance to the British and trade with Jamaica was significant.

The lower map shows the region, now Honduras, and on it the Rio Tinto from where the letters were sent.



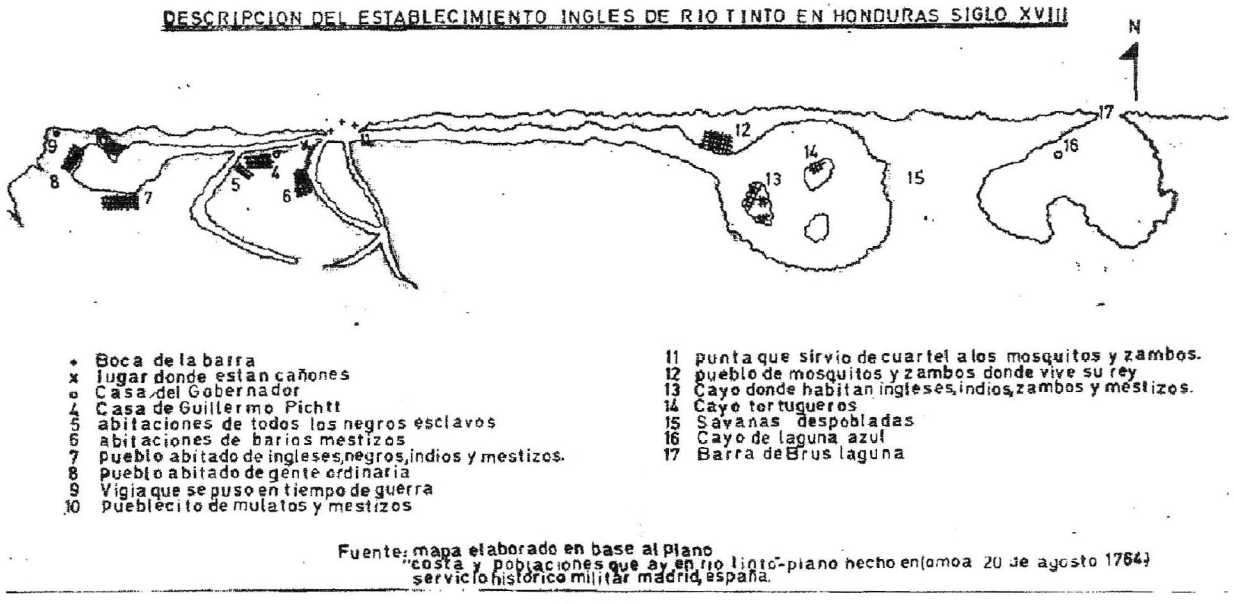

*Letter dated "Gunpowder Plot" (November 5th) 1763, fro. Black River, Mosquito Shore to Bristol endorsed "Received and forwarded 14th April 1764 by J Campbell".*

The first letter, and the earlier of the two, reads as follows:

> "I am come back here from the Bay of Honduras after doing what was to be done there. I am in health and all my affairs in good channel. I have heard no more from Jamaica about this Shore, but I hope it will be saved.
>
> Every letter I write on business costs me three viz. one rough copy, the proper letter, and the copy into my letter book; and oftentimes a duplicate and what with that and settling private business I am pretty well employed for the present so I must refer you to Mr. Campbell for an account of my (wonderful) proceedings.
>
> The King's Warrant arrived in Jamaica Aug. 10th last (1763) and neither for some time before that, not since (I rather mean to Oct. 25th last for a ship has been here that left Jamaica on that day) has any letter of any sort from England come to that island for me as far as I can learn.
>
> It is not unlikely but the course of the service am upon may bring me home in the end and that cannot be far off."

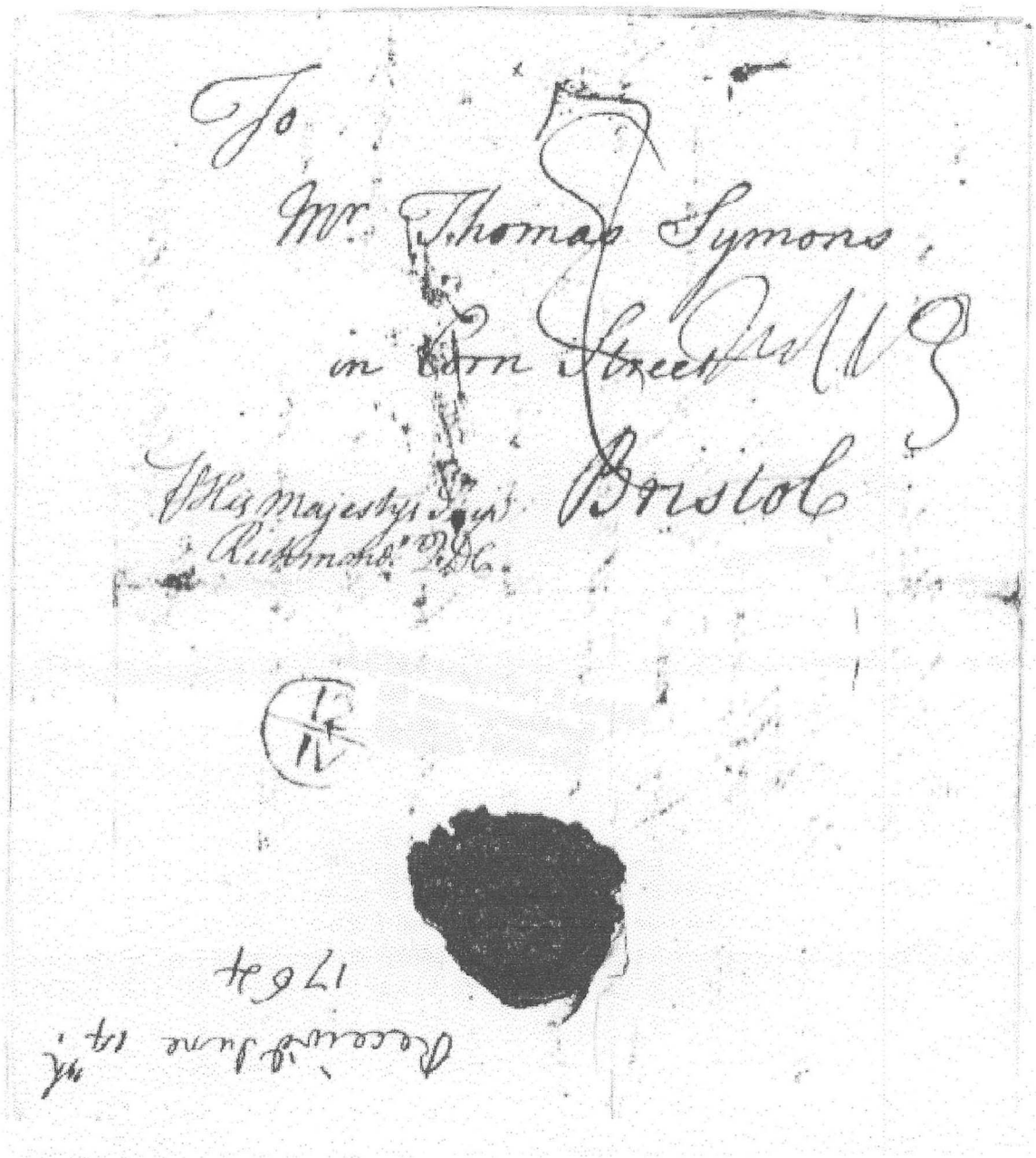
"Rio Tinto" and "Black River" are, I believe, the Spanish and English names for the same place on the northern coast of Honduras. The nearest town on the present day map of Honduras is Plaplaya at the mouth of the Sico River. The Black or "Tinto" River runs into the Sico a few miles inland. The town is about 15 miles east in a straight line from Iriona.

The Black River settlement, shown below on a map published in Honduras in a booklet about the Fort at San Fernando de Omoa, was the largest settlement in this part of the coast.


DESCRIPCION DEL ESTABLECIMIENTO INGLES DE RIO TINTO EN HONDURAS SIGLO XVIII
N
+ Boca de la barra
x lugar donde estan cañones
o Casa del Gobernador
4 Casa de Guillermo Pichtt
5 abitaciones de todos los negros esclavos
6 abitaciones de barios mestizos
7 Pueblo abitado de ingleses,negros,indios y mestizos.
8 Pueblo abitado de gente ordinaria
9 Vigia que se puso en tiempo de guerra
10 Pueblecito de mulatos y mestizos
11 punta que sirvio de cuartel a los mosquitos y zambos.
12 pueblo de mosquitos y zambos donde vive su rey
13 Cayo donde habitan ingleses,indios,zambos y mestizos.
14 Cayo tortugueros
15 Savanas despobladas
16 Cayo de laguna azul
17 Barra de Brus laguna
Fuente: mapa elaborado en base al plano "costa y poblaciones que ay en rio tinto"-plano hecho en(omoa 20 de agosto 1764) servicio historico militar madrid, españa.

The second letter contains a reference to Ing Luis Diez Navarro. He was the engineer in charge of the contruction of the big Spanish Fort at Omoa in the 1770's and 1780's. The letter from the King of Englend was probably a copy of the Treaty of Paris regarding the dismantling of all the English forts on the Mosquito Coast.

Black River, Mosquito Shore March 1.st 1764




*Letter dated 1 March 1764, from the Black River, Mosquito Shore to Bristol, endorsed "P. His Majesty's Ship Richmond".*

This second letter, a year later, is more informative. A transcript appears on the next page.

"In the first place I am well. In the next I am shipping home Sarsaparill XC[a] which I expect to clear me at least six hundred Pounds Sterling, by the Ship Charles Town John Simpson for London.

In the next I hope you have long ago received the 200 Sterling bill I drew in your favour on Mr. Spencer. If any more will be of use to you, You may now command treble that sum; but I do not send you an order for that because if it will not be of use to you, it will prevent likewise its' use to me for several months, but however I hope to get home before the year is out and I will then tell you (although telling so is needless because I hope you know it) all I have is ready for any purpose that will be useful to you.

In the next place pray acquaint Mr. Campbell that the transport with all the soldiers left this place for Jamaica on 23rd last [23 February 1764] but that I stay behind to carry the guns (if I have time I will enclose a copy of my Governor L----n on that subject when the transport returns.

Please likewise acquaint him that the Spanish officers were a Cornet ( ?? in Spanish I think) of Dragoons and a Lieutenant of a Guarda Costa Brigentine; the Cornet was the chief person but came ashore sick and died in two days before he was able to say or do anything but send a letter to Captain Otway from Don Luiz Diez Navarro, Colonel in the Spanish Army which he brought from him at Port Omoa where he, the Colonel, waits an answer. The purpose of the letter is to acquaint Captain Otway that he, (the Colonel) is coming to this place with a letter (carta) of His Britannic Majesty's to show to Captain Otway and that then he can leave the determination of what is to be done in consequence to Captain Otway himself, he says he is coming in the most peaceable manner without troops or any appearance of hostility, and writes much like a gentleman and man of sense. But I am apt to think he sent the officers first in order to be satisfied whether he might come in safety after them; what his paper is (from His Britannic Majesty) the Lord knows, perhaps a duplicate of my warrant, but I hope no secret Article between the Courts. However they bring a good deal of money to trade with which shows no evil purpose. Pray advise Mr Campbell to make use of any of my papers and letters that he pleases.

I wish I could tell Mr Campbell's Gentleman of what I shall do after I have executed the Warrant. I had the sight of my Commission for it is I believe the oldest in the Army (of its Rank) and if His Majesty does not give me another I will ?? make soon for the youngest and wish him better served.

I cannot say anything of a Correspondent at Bristol . . a Partner would not do without he was a man ready to afford me a good deal of assistance; for as I can stand on my own legs as well why should I share the advantage I am making with one whom perhaps I must lug along? but if I stay, or return to this country I can find good employment for a Factor at Bristol.

I write a second Bill of Exchange at the bottom of this letter the value of which I beg you to remit to Mrs H[odgson] without any receipt from her.

I expect the Charles Town to sail in about three weeks so I will write again by her, in the meantime I will beg you to write to Mr Spence of St Mary Ax, Merchant to get two hundred and fifty pounds sterling assured on (about 6000 Sarsap Indigo and a few small articles) the interest I shall ship (& consign to him) in the Charles Town she is about 250 tons Burthen and bound directly to London with Mahogany, at the same time acquaint him that you letter is to serve for a duplicate of one I have written already.

35.0.0 Sterling — Black River Mosquito Shore Jan[y] 1st 1764

Sir At ten days sight of this my second of Exchange (first not paid) Pay to Mr. Thomas Symons or his order the sum of thirty five Pounds Sterling and place it to my account to John Calcroft Esq in Chanel Row Westminster.

I am Sir
Your most humble servant
Robert Hodgson."

[In all I believe four letters from the Mosquito Coast (two "Honduran" and two "Nicaraguan") and one from Corn Island are known, all found in a Jamaican lot at auction - Ed]